

Coaching for Commitment

"Coaching is not just a function; it is a state of mind!"

—Amy Zehnder, Ph.D., PCC

GO AHEAD, We dare you! Find a good definition of coaching that you can easily remember. It's like trying to define leadership. There are hundreds of definitions out there, each one with a different mix of verbs and adjectives, each one trying to include statements about ownership, action items, and empowerment. You know the drill. Put some fancy definition together that nobody remembers or is capable of repeating without reading it, and you have a best seller! So, here it is. A definition of coaching in its most simplified, unglamorous form:

Coaching is all about the person being coached (PBC)!

Successful Coaching: A Working Definition

For those of you who would like a more comprehensive definition of coaching, one that you can sink your teeth into, here it is:

Successful coaching is a conversation of self-discovery that follows a logical process and leads to superior performance, commitment to sustained growth, and positive relationships.

All successful coaching conversations are pointed toward improving performance and ensuring a commitment to sustained superior performance and growth. These results can only be achieved through self-discovery on the part of the person being coached (PBC). Another outcome of successful coaching is the strengthening or improvement of positive relationships. One fundamental assumption of this book is that coaching can and should happen with top performers as often as under-performers.

You are coaching any time you help the PBC to close a gap in acuity, expertise, performance, or proficiency. Coaching is taking place whenever you assist another person in some sort of self-discovery. You are coaching when you help people find their own creative solutions. You are coaching when you help people discover new ways of thinking. You are coaching when you encourage people to find ways to maintain or improve their performance or to reach new stretch goals. You are coaching when you affirm others' commitment to personal development and acknowledge their successes.

Coaching occurs any time a personal and mutual interaction takes place by which the PBC experiences growth or ah-ha moments. Ah-ha moments happen when a light bulb comes on for someone you are coaching as a result of a personal revelation or discovery.

Coaching conversations can be both informal and formal. Informal coaching interactions are sometimes referred to as "coaching moments." Coaching moments typically last from two to ten minutes. They are quick coaching conversations that reaffirm the PBC is on the right track. They can occur after a formal coaching conversation has occurred. Most often, coaching moments are used to touch base, notice improvement, validate effort, or quickly redirect from a previous performance coaching conversation (based on the PBC's action plan). Formal coaching interactions typically last thirty to ninety minutes. In this book you will

be introduced to the three-stage InDiCom coaching model, a set of five CLEAR coaching skills, and ways to plan for your coaching. These are applicable to both informal and formal coaching conversations. For a better understanding, Table 1.1 defines what coaching is and is not.

Table 1.1. Coaching Is/Is Not

| COACHING IS | COACHING IS NOT |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Accountability | A one-time event |
| Asking | Assuming |
| Caring | Avoidance |
| Clarifying | Blaming |
| Direct | Controlling |
| Discovering | Disciplinary Action |
| Egoless | Discouraging |
| Empowering | Leading |
| Encouraging | Limited |
| Listening | Prescriptive |
| Mutual | Reactive |
| Open-ended | Restrictive |
| Possibilities | Rigid |
| Positive | Sarcastic |
| Powerful | Solving |
| Proactive | Talking |
| Relevant | Telling |
| Supportive | Touchy-Feely |
| What they think! | What you think! |

Coaching Works

The first reason for the ever-growing popularity of coaching, and possibly your interest in reading this book, is that coaching works! It is a proven strategy for creating sustained growth and achieving superior performance of individual, teams, and whole organizations. Testimonials to the value of coaching can be found in one or more business and training publications every month. Every performance function of every organization has benefited from coaching for as long as people have shared information about performance and how to improve it.

Not only does coaching work, but the reasons why it works are plentiful:

- Leaders need coaching skills to manage change.
- Executives need coaching skills to foster decision-making authority in others.
- Team leaders need coaching skills to support the development and performance of their teams.
- Sales managers need coaching skills because every sales person is successful in his or her own way.
- Customer service is improved by coaching people on how to respond to the expectations, jubulations, and irritations of their customers.
- Administrators need coaching skills to more effectively work with colleagues and co-workers.
- Teachers need coaching skills to work better with colleagues and students.

On-the-job training, mentoring, leading, managing, whatever the topic or role—in today's world—people need to have coaching skills.

Coaching is not dated, it is as current as you reading this book right now. Many organizations have found that coaching is the key to maintaining the competitive advantage in the marketplace. Coaching individuals who have made a psychological commitment to take actions that are in alignment with organizational objectives is a powerful way for organizations to achieve phenomenal results. Through coaching, individuals and organizations achieve maximum performance.

The Meaning of Commitment

A central theme of this book is that commitment is the key to superior performance and that coaching is the strategy for building that commitment. First, it is useful to clarify what commitment means.

One definition of Commitment found in the Merriam-Webster online dictionary is as follows:

Main Entry: com-mit-ment: Function: noun. 2 a: an agreement or pledge to do something in the future.. b: something pledged c: the state or an instance of being obligated or emotionally impelled <a commitment to a cause>

This suggests that commitment is not just the physical act of follow-through, but also an emotional necessity or obligation.

An independent study conducted by Kinlaw (1991) determined the characteristics of superior teams. One dominant characteristic of superior teams was that team members felt “committed.” People on superior teams described themselves as:

- Being focused.
- Looking forward to going to work.
- Caring about results and how well the team did.
- Taking it quite personally when the team did not meet its goals.
- Making personal sacrifices to make sure the team succeeded.
- Being determined to succeed.
- Never giving up.

Each of these things speaks to a level of commitment from the team’s members.

The following is a typical example of what commitment looked like to a drafter in a design shop:

“Coming to work in our shop means coming to work. We meet our schedules and we expect a completed design to be just that, complete. We take it very personally when our customer wants to make modifications when we submit our final. It means that we didn’t do a good enough job staying in touch at every step from concept to finished product.”

Commitment follows clarity and meaning. People need to connect what they do to some larger whole. They need to know how what they do contributes to their organization's success. They need to see the big picture.

Commitment, like motivation, is not something that you can observe directly. You infer that it exists because of what people do. You say that people are "committed" when they demonstrate over and over again their determination to do their best and their unwillingness to give up in the face of obstacles. Committed people in organizations are tied intellectually and emotionally to the values and goals of the organization. Committed people know what they are doing, and they believe that what they are doing is important. People cannot become committed to what is vague or trivial.

Some years ago, Dennis Kinlaw (1999) was consulting to a division of the old "Ma Bell" system and had an opportunity to observe firsthand the commitment of employees to perform consistently at their very best. It was obvious that one reason these employees demonstrated such commitment was that they had such a clear understanding of what was important and stayed focused on it. What was important became obvious whenever he asked any employee what his or her job was. Whether these employees were in purchasing or installation, or members of a line crew—their answers were the same: "My job is dial tone." These employees were committed to the one overarching goal (shared vision) of the company. They believed that giving the customer dial tone and restoring dial tone took precedence over everything else. Dial tone was the symbol for a working phone system. They understood the goal, and they had no question that it was of supreme importance.

Today, many companies may have a similar goal centered on connectivity: "Our goal is Internet connectivity." This is especially true for online companies and companies that rely heavily on online services.

A common complaint among leaders about the service and administrative functions in their organizations is that the people in these functions are "not committed to the bottom line" or they "don't have

the big picture.” These leaders are often right, but continually do not see their own part in the problem.

“Pushing paper,” as a job duty, can range anywhere from filing, to keeping funding requests flowing smoothly, to ensuring every employee is paid on time. These are big jobs! And they are more likely to be done well if the people doing them see it clearly as a step in fulfilling the company’s mission. If you want “support” staff to share the same commitment to the company’s bottom line, then you must show them how their services and products contribute to that bottom line. A job is only a job until it becomes a commitment, and commitment is only possible when people see the *meaning* in what they do.

Building Commitment Through Coaching

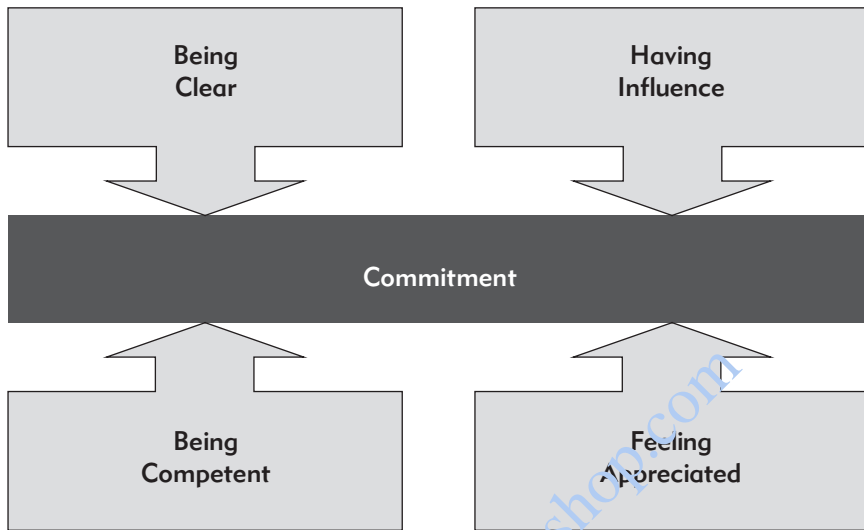
Figure 1.1 displays four critical conditions that contribute to the development of commitment. People tend to become fully committed to do their best all of the time to the degree that they:

- Are clear about core values and performance goals.
- Have influence over what they do.
- Have the competence to perform the jobs that are expected of them.
- Are appreciated for their performance.

Coaching is a particularly powerful way to develop these conditions for individuals and teams. Each of these conditions is explained, including the special contribution that successful coaching makes in creating each.

Being Clear

An accepted fundamental condition for building the commitment of people in organizations is that they are clear about the organization’s foundation or core values and its primary goals. When people are clear about the organization’s values and goals, they can align their

Figure 1.1. Four Critical Conditions for Building Commitment

work to these goals, which in turn provides role clarity and a sense of belonging.

Ambivalence and confusion are the enemies of commitment. Values that are clearly communicated, adhered to, and reinforced by the behaviors of leaders give people the basis for making decisions when there are no specific rules for making such decisions. Knowing what the real values, goals, and vision of an organization are provides members a framework within which a vast variety of behaviors are possible, and it helps people resolve conflicts over priorities. When values and goals are not clear, commitment cannot be built, and performance suffers.

Coaching resolves questions about values and goals through a process of collaboration and consensus. It is easy to see the importance of clarifying goals when looking at teams. Team members often begin their tasks with high energy and determination, but problems can undermine progress and commitment. One of the most common problems a team can experience is changing priorities. When teams change priorities, they must resolve new problems, make decisions, analyze

data, reprioritize, and strategize how to move forward. If during this process they continually have to change directions or digress from the goal, the energy level drops, discouragement sets in, and members begin to feel that they are wasting time and become frustrated. At this point, the team needs someone to address resistance, encourage forward movement, and ultimately facilitate the team's ability to reconnect the new priorities with core values, overall team goals, and individual roles. The team needs someone to help them recommit—that is, they need a coach. The best coach in these cases is often a team member.

Issuing goals and publishing values in a work group or organization does not automatically result in exerting practical influence over what people do. Some of the more frequent kinds of conversation that take place among peers and between workers and their appointed leaders are those in which people raise questions about what is important, what should be done first, when a job is considered complete, and how to fulfill expectations. All such questions present opportunities for coaching interactions.

Having Influence

Many of you have seen how people perform when they are consistently denied any say-so in their jobs and are expected to follow unquestionably the decisions of their leaders.

Leaders who deny people influence receive what they deserve. People who do *exactly* what they are told to do—nothing more, nothing less.

Every person in any organization is presented countless opportunities to encourage others to explore and analyze the various problems they must solve about their work and about their relationships with others. The power of self-managed teams comes from the opportunity that members have to influence the performance of teammates (and their managers) by the free use of their own knowledge and skills.

It takes discipline to encourage people to exert influence. Think of the many ways that people routinely inhibit others from fully expressing an

idea or thinking independently. An example of this is demonstrated in the following story:

Gary was at his mother-in-law's house and she asked him to check the oil in her car. Like all good sons-in-law, he didn't hesitate. He immediately went into the garage to check the oil in Shelly's car (something that he'd done in his own car many times). A few minutes later, Shelly went into the garage and noticed that Gary was looking very closely at the end of the dip stick. She quickly informed Gary that he wasn't doing it "right" by saying, "No Gary, you have to wipe it off first and put it back in to get a good reading." He bristled with resistance and replied, "You can tell me what to do [check the oil], or how to do it [wipe it off first and put it back in], but not both!"

All too often, managers do the same thing to their employees. They tell them both *what to do* and *how to do it* leaving no room for independent thought or application of knowledge and skill, or they come into a situation midstream, make assumptions, and act without having all the information. In the previous example, how did Shelly know that Gary hadn't already wiped the dipstick? He may have been checking the level accurately, but she didn't take the time to find out.

The words, "You can tell me what to do, or how to do it, but not both," make a compelling point. By telling people both *what* and *how* to do something, you stifle creativity and diminish their ability to influence. If you only tell people *what* to do, they will have input and creativity in figuring out *how* it should get done. If you only tell people *how* something should be completed, are you willing to live with *what* they come up with?

Every successful coaching conversation is about how the PBC can influence the *what* and the *how*. As a coach, you will want to make full use of what the PBC knows, thinks, and discovers. Coaching helps people gain new insight, which in turn helps them to discover new opportunities to exert influence over their jobs and their lives. It gives

them choices, reinforces self-esteem, encourages innovation, and allows for a feeling of self-sufficiency, pride, and the ability to have influence over their own outcomes. Disciplined coaches help others identify their own needs and help them shape the way those needs are met. Coaching often helps others set their own performance expectations and career goals.

When you observe successful coaches in action, you will hear them using the following kinds of phrases, calculated to help others influence their own outcomes:

- “How do you think you should go about resolving this issue?”
- “What sorts of things have you tried so far?”
- “How can you influence this?”
- “What is within your control?”
- “What resources can you identify that can help?”

Being Competent

Another condition that produces commitment in people to do their best all of the time is that they feel competent. People do not naturally want to fail, but they will often try to avoid the tasks that they think they cannot do. If you want commitment from people, you must ensure they have the tools, resources, ability, and willingness to succeed in their jobs. Ensuring that people have the knowledge, skill, experience, tools, and resources to perform and confidence to perform are critical elements to building competency in others. Coaching accomplishes both of these.

Coaching is the means by which people feel supported in learning the new knowledge and skills they need to do their best. Although the knowledge and skill is mostly obtained through training, on-the-job experience, and by working with subject-matter experts, coaching supports the individualized learning curve and helps people find the confidence to test their new skills and take the initiative to learn more.

Here are a few of the reasons that successful coaching is such a powerful strategy for building competence. The personal, interactive nature of coaching:

- Makes it easy for people to succeed by helping them break their learning into small increments.
- Provides the PBC with the opportunity to demonstrate and verify new learning during the process of being coached.
- Gives people personal encouragement and support, which increases the probability of success.
- Makes it possible for people to fail safely and to learn from mistakes.
- Challenges people to attempt more and more difficult tasks.

Coaching is the one sure way that you can find out exactly what others do not know and what they need to know—simply by asking the right questions. Coaching is also a way to give support and to reassure people who are taking on new tasks. Coaching facilitates the process of learning, because it is timely and focuses exactly on what each individual or team needs. Successful learning, in turn, builds confidence.

Feeling Appreciated

Finally, to achieve commitment one must feel appreciated. One of Kinlaw's theories was that if you want to know how people feel about their organization and their work, check the bathrooms. In one company the bathrooms were always immaculate. The whole place looked as though it had been scrubbed with a toothbrush. One time the "being cleaned" sign was out and the janitor was cleaning, so Dr. Kinlaw took the chance to thank him and to tell him what a great job he was doing. Then he asked him, "What makes you do it? Why do you do such a great job?" The janitor answered, "Because I know everyone appreciates it being nice."

Kinlaw later found out that a senior leader in the building set the example of making people feel appreciated; he routinely took special

care to thank the janitor for his work. Once, the senior leader, after preparing a letter of appreciation, summoned the janitor to the fourth floor. Because the janitor didn't know why he had been called to the executive floor, he was pleasantly surprised when the vice president of the company presented him with the letter.

So how can you predict an organization's performance? The most reliable variables are employees' perceptions of clarity, fairness, responsiveness, involvement, and appreciation. Even an employee's workspace can tell you something about the environment. The variable that employees are often least positive about is appreciation.

Everyone can learn something about appreciation. Sometimes what people do not know about appreciation is mind-boggling. During a seminar one participant said to another participant, "Say, Kevin, you mentioned during our last discussion that you make it a point to write people thank-you notes when they go out of their way or do something special. Just what sort of things do you say in those notes?" Kevin replied, "I always try to acknowledge the specific behavior or the action, along with the positive impact it had on others. For example, "Alison, the feedback you provided on my last report was extremely helpful because I knew exactly what I needed to change. Thank you for being so clear." In response to this, one tough-minded leader in the class said, "Well, where I come from, the appreciation that you get for doing a good job is that you get to keep your job." Surprisingly, this mindset is still common; many managers believe that they do not need to continually thank people because what they are doing is part of their job description. Being "too busy" is another common excuse for not thanking employees for a job well done. This bull-headedness may sound good to some, but it doesn't work! Not if you are looking for commitment. Commitment to superior performance is a function of clarity, competence, influence, and appreciation. People work the best when they believe that what they do counts for something to someone else—especially the people with whom they work.

Among the many things that successful coaching accomplishes is that it communicates personal appreciation. During your coaching

conversations, you will encourage the PBC and show appreciation for his or her ideas. You will acknowledge and celebrate the PBC's successes and make him or her feel that you are supportive and care about the success, and that you do so from a perspective larger than just "bottom line" thinking. You will make people feel appreciated by valuing their ideas, their self-discoveries, their growth, their action plans, and their commitment to action. Successful coaches use every opportunity to emphasize the strengths and accomplishments of the PBC. Appreciation is often shown by the words you use during your coaching conversations. Common expressions found in extended coaching interactions include the following:

- "Thanks for putting such effort in to working through this problem. It will save the team a lot of time."
- "Your ideas were fabulous and should get you to where you want to go."
- "I know it wasn't easy to look at the problems you are having on your team, and I do appreciate your being so candid in talking about it."
- "I like how you are not letting this small setback cast a shadow over all of the good work you've done."

Commitment, in summary, is the dominating key to superior performance. There are four critical conditions that determine whether the PBC becomes fully committed to continually do his or her best:

1. Being Clear: The PBC is clear about core values and performance goals.
2. Having Influence: The PBC has influence over *what* he or she does and *how* he or she does it.
3. Being Competent: The PBC has the competencies to perform the job that is expected of him or her.
4. Feeling Appreciated: The PBC is appreciated for his or her performance.

Every conversation is potentially a coaching conversation. It is a chance to discover new ways to look at things, new ways to accomplish goals, and opportunities to create ah-ha moments that help people see things from a different perspective. It is a chance to reaffirm and reinforce the PBC's alignment to the organization's core values. It is a chance to hear ideas and involve others in the processes of planning and problem solving. And more importantly, it is a chance to say "thank you for a job well done."

Coaching for Commitment

Coaching is something you do *with* people, not *to* them. Coaching is considered successful when people commit to their ideas and put their words into action. More than that, your goal as a coach should be to commit to modeling the coaching behaviors and skills presented in this book. Imagine the power of many coaches working together to build commitment to sustained growth and superior performance—through people.

Coaching Moment

Current Reality: Use a 1 to 3 scale to answer the following questions:

1 = not committed at all 2 = somewhat committed 3 = totally committed

1. What is your personal level of commitment to coaching?
2. What is your personal level of commitment to creating a coaching culture?
3. (if applicable) What is your manager's level of commitment to coaching?
4. (if applicable) What is your manager's level of commitment to creating a coaching culture?
5. (if applicable) What is your organization's level of commitment to coaching?

6. (if applicable) What is your organization's level of commitment to creating a coaching culture?

Ideal State: Where do you think the level of commitment should be for each?

Action Plan: What is your part in maintaining the current level (if above 1) or achieving a higher level? How can you influence others?

Chapter Summary

Simple Coaching Definition:

Coaching is all about the person being coached (PBC)!

Comprehensive Coaching Definition:

Successful coaching is a conversation of self-discovery that follows a logical process and leads to superior performance, commitment to sustained growth, and positive relationships.

Commitment is a key strategy for obtaining phenomenal organizational results. Commitment is created when the people being coached:

- Are clear about core values and performance goals.
- Have influence over *what* they do and *how* they do it.
- Have the competencies to perform the jobs that are expected of them.
- Are appreciated for their performance.

Coaching is considered successful when the coach:

- Helps the PBC to commit to his or her ideas and put them into action.
- Effectively models coaching for commitment skills and behaviors.